

CULTURE CHANGE IN LOMA: A PRELIMINARY RESEARCH REPORT¹

KURT H. WOLFF

The Ohio State University,
Columbus 10, Ohio

"Loma," "Justino" County, Southwest, is a relatively isolated community of some 200 people (40 families). Most of them are Spanish-speaking; the rest are "Anglos," non-Spanish, English-speaking "Whites." The community lies 7,000 feet high, in a little valley stretching across a state road, which, in rainy weather, it is a special art to travel.

Almost all Spanish persons were born in Justino County, and a majority in Loma itself. The Anglos are much more heterogeneous in this, as well as in many other respects; even occupationally: one is a trader and store owner, his wife running the post-office; another rents cabins; but all also farm. The Spanish people make their living farming and doing wage work outside Loma (most of them combining both), especially sheepherding, sheepshearing, and potato picking. Land is the chief property. Anglo acreages and values are higher than Spanish, but there is much variation within each class.

For about 40 years, Loma has had a public grade school. The church (Catholic), only some ten years old, is a "mission" of the Justino parish. Mass is held once a month, not on a Sunday, by an Anglo priest. The Anglos belong to various non-Catholic denominations, or to none.

People look lean, and many are bony. At least the Spanish diet is deficient. Sickness is widespread. Much of it is undiagnosed. Infant mortality is high. Birth control is practically unknown.

Loma history has few specific dates. Some tenants lived in the locality as long as 120 years ago. Water rights were granted by the Mexican government. Soon the first irrigation ditch was dug; and about 60 years ago, an Anglo pioneer dug the first well. The most far-reaching event was the establishment of the National Forest early in this century. It eliminated sheep and goats by preempting grazing lands and pasture, thus depriving the Lomans (*Lomeños*) of basic sources of income: of meat, milk, and cheese for food; of wool for spinning and weaving; and, indirectly, of spinning, weaving, and related skills. The next important change factors, more difficult to date, were the introduction of the automobile and the less directly significant contacts with other urban inventions—

¹This paper, read at the Twenty-fifth Annual Meeting of the Central States Branch, American Anthropological Association, Indiana University, Bloomington, May 13 and 14, 1949, is a very concentrated synopsis of some parts of a large-scale monograph on Loma designed to develop and document a conception of social science, especially sociology and cultural anthropology, and particularly, the study of culture. (Other parts of the monograph already published are: "A Methodological Note on the Empirical Establishment of Culture Patterns," *American Sociological Review*, 15: 10: 176-184, April, 1945, and "The Unique and the General: Toward a Philosophy of Sociology," *Philosophy of Science*, 15: 192-210, July, 1948.) Field work in Loma was done in 1942 and 1944; in 1944, on a Social Science Research Council fellowship. Writing up was begun in 1948 and 1949 under grants from The Viking Fund, Inc., and the Graduate School of The Ohio State University. In the summer of 1947, a graduate student spent several weeks in Loma under the joint supervision of Dr. John W. Bennett and myself (all of Ohio State University); material collected by this student is part of the sources utilized here, as well as in the first volume of the monograph written up thus far. To these organizations and persons I gratefully acknowledge my indebtedness.

This paper, probably, will appear to be largely impressionistic, due overwhelmingly, if not wholly, to the impossibility of anything more than very slight documentation, in view of the time limitations under which it had to be presented; even the methodology employed could be indicated, if at all, only by implication. Reference for full documentation must therefore be made to the forthcoming monograph.

radio, magazines, dance halls with their nickelodeons in Alta (the nearest community to the south), the movie in Justino, and latest, electricity. In most of these diffusions, federal and county agencies and the Loma Institute were instrumental.

The defunct Farm Security Administration was the most important federal agency economically and, in conjunction with other farm-improving services, for reforms in agriculture as well. People recognized this: the FSA made more sense to them than did any other effort. Individuals who benefited from it also rated WPA highly. The Soil Conservation Service has met with some interest, but most of the plans discussed in connection with its District have not yet materialized. The County Agent, according to the individual who occupies the office, may function as merely one of the numerous vague entities called "government officials" or as an intimate friend and adviser.

Justino, the seat of all these and other governmental agencies, also houses the tax authorities. On the whole, they are felt to be functionaries of a vast and fateful power. In 1940, more than half the farms in the county had become the property of the state for back taxes, often without the knowledge of the original owner. For Loma, the figure may be as high as one-fourth. In 1941, the percentages which taxes represented of incomes ranged from one to 75.

Directly or indirectly, the agencies try to introduce a foreign-imposed type of community organization of a non-traditional, non-religious, non-feudal, non-Spanish type. Yet it was the Justino Plan and the Loma Institute which were most intent upon improving conditions by rational measures. The Plan, which operated for about three years during the early 1940's, obtained "problem lists" from representatives of all communities in the county. It cooperated with the other agencies, public and private, and with the people in the communities themselves. In Loma in 1942, the most urgent problems, according to the residents, were water scarcity, with the building of a reservoir and the adjustment of ditches given highest rating as suggested solutions; inadequate education, with additional teachers named as a measure of improvement; and poor health. The Justino Plan did various things in regard to these and many other problems, and ever since its demise, several efforts have continued.

The Loma Institute, created and directed by a midwestern Anglo teacher and his wife, was more intimately connected with the community directly. It developed through money gotten together by means of summer camps, frequented by boys and girls from as far away as New York. Later, a year-round grade and high school was run, mainly with local Spanish students. Due to the scarcity of personnel, decimated by military service, and to shifting interests on the part of the few individuals left, the Institute altogether lasted only five years. Yet while running, it was engaged not only in formal education but also in various other community activities, such as the 4-H Club, health clinics, the establishment and supervision of a community center, dances, and the like. Aside from direct give and take, the most outstanding means of communication between the Institute and the community was a newspaper, *The Lomeño*. Written and mimeographed by staff and students, it gave expression, particularly, to the Institute's emphasis upon participation in political life, local, county, state, and national.

In spite of these efforts, however, planning and organized cooperation in matters where they were not traditional (as, for instance, in irrigation) remained foreign to the people. Here, however, the narrative must be interrupted, in order to insert a methodological note or, perhaps, to confirm an observation made by the reader, namely, that what has been said thus far refers mainly to the Spanish people of Loma. Beyond showing this awareness, it is not possible to do more than to point out, rather peremptorily, that the reason for this preferential treatment is Loma's being a predominantly Spanish community, in more than one respect, and to state that from now on, the Spanish society and culture of Loma exclusively will be dealt with. To resume the argument, then: how much planning and organized cooperation remained foreign to the *Lomeños* is suggested by the

answers to questions concerning their community, asked of them in 1942. One question was: "How much land do you think is needed for raising enough animals and crops to supply yourself and your family without having to go outside for wage-work?" Answers to it ranged from 15 to 250 acres. Another was: "Given the cultivable land and the water available, how many families do you believe can make a living in Loma without having to go outside for work?" Replies ran from two to 25 families. Still other questions resulted in comparable answers: all showed polite compliance with the type of request that was made, but did not go beyond this, toward a more empirical preoccupation with the topics brought up.

Almost all that has been said illustrates Loma culture change. Anglo-carried phenomena—economic, technological, industrial, urban—act upon a culture formerly not so impressed. This impact is both local and pervasive. (Cf. Fig. 1.) Among the local elements, in chronological order, are Anglo-derived education, the National Forest, the Anglo-operated trading post and store, the post office, the

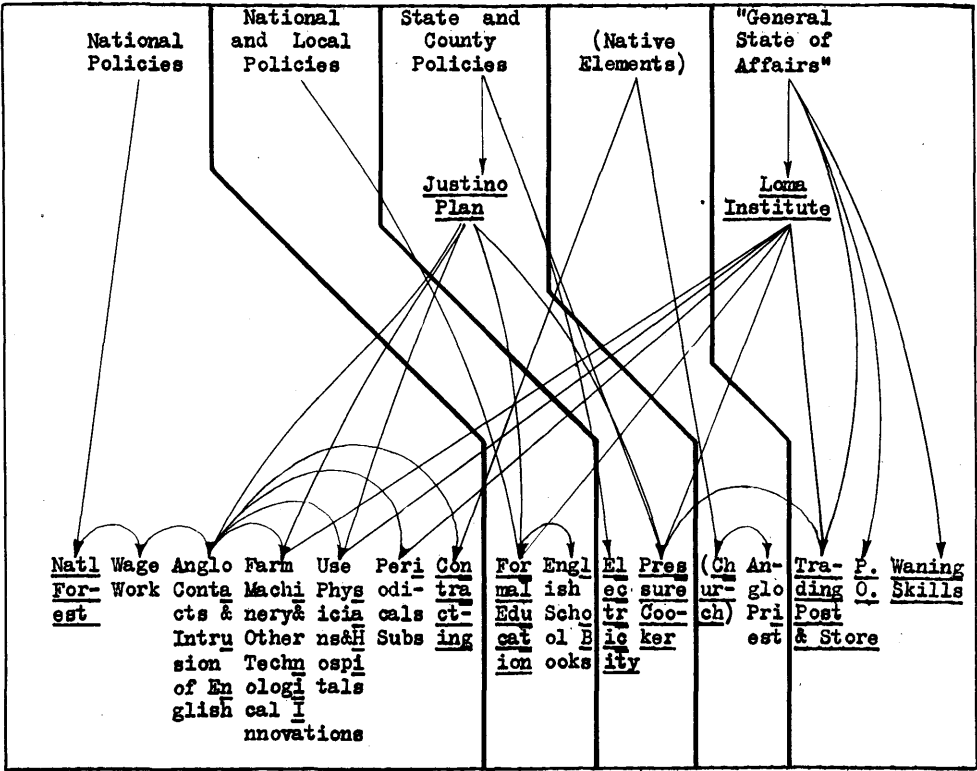


FIG. 1. Elements in the Process of Loma Culture Change. The top line lists influences (whose preponderant direction is indicated by arrows) outside the local change system, with the possible exception of the vague last, "General State of Affairs." The bottom line lists elements operating in the Loma culture as of 1948 (and thereafter). These elements are shown in their connections with one another, as well as with the influences listed on the top line. Two elements (Justino Plan and Loma Institute) are placed in an intermediate position to indicate that they were no longer in existence in 1948. Underscoring indicates the fact that the item can be traced only to an influence outside the local change system; non-underscored items can be traced to influences within this system. The—undoubtedly existing—influences of items on the bottom line are not indicated except for a few specific ones (the chain leading from National Forest to Contracting; the introduction of English School Books through Formal Education; of the Anglo Priest through the Church; and of Pressure Cooker and Post Office through the Trading Post and Store). The parentheses around "Church" indicate that this element is native.

Anglo priest, and the short-lived Justino Plan and Loma Institute. More pervasive elements, in approximately chronological order, are the intrusion of English and of English school books, the appearance of outside wage work, the waning of handicrafts, contracting, farm machinery, the use of physicians and hospitals, the introduction of sewing machines, pressure cookers, and other household appliances, of magazine and newspaper subscriptions, and of electricity.

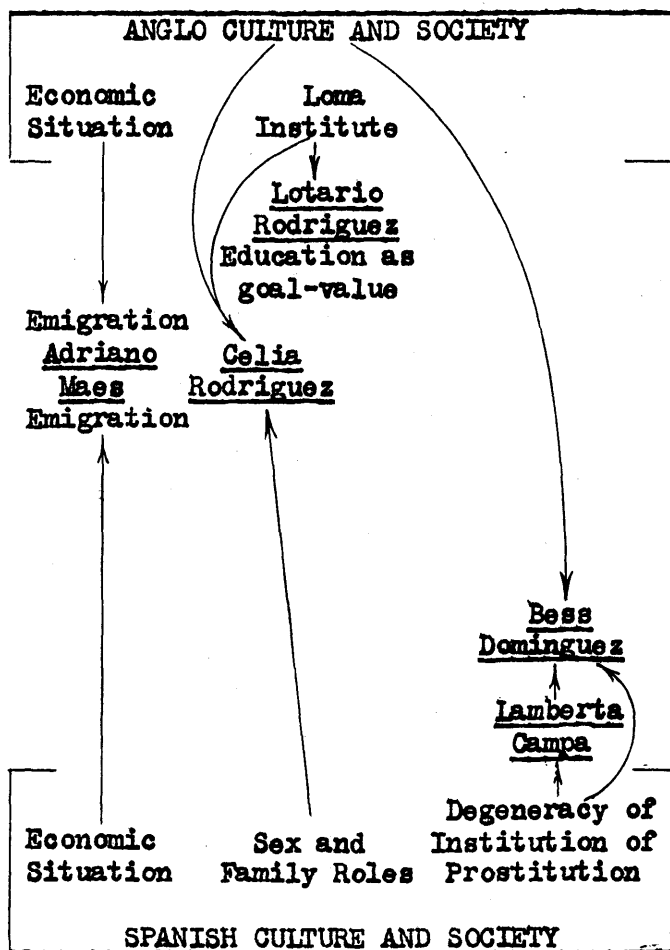


FIG. 2. Elements in the Process of Culture Change on the Part of Five Lomans. The positions of the five individuals diagrammed symbolize their respective "nearness" to Anglo and Spanish culture and society, respectively. Arrows indicate preponderant direction of influence.

In a much more intimate fashion, the process of this change is shown in life histories (see Fig. 2) and in compositions written by upper-grade school children. Lotario Rodriguez, a twenty-year old boy who graduated from the state university (thus far the only Spanish Loman to do this), exemplifies a change of Loman culture through the incorporation of (Anglo) education as a goal-value. Another type results from socio-economic change. It is illustrated by several young married men, for instance, Adriano Maes, who emigrated, probably for good, preponderantly on economic grounds. A third type, perhaps, is represented

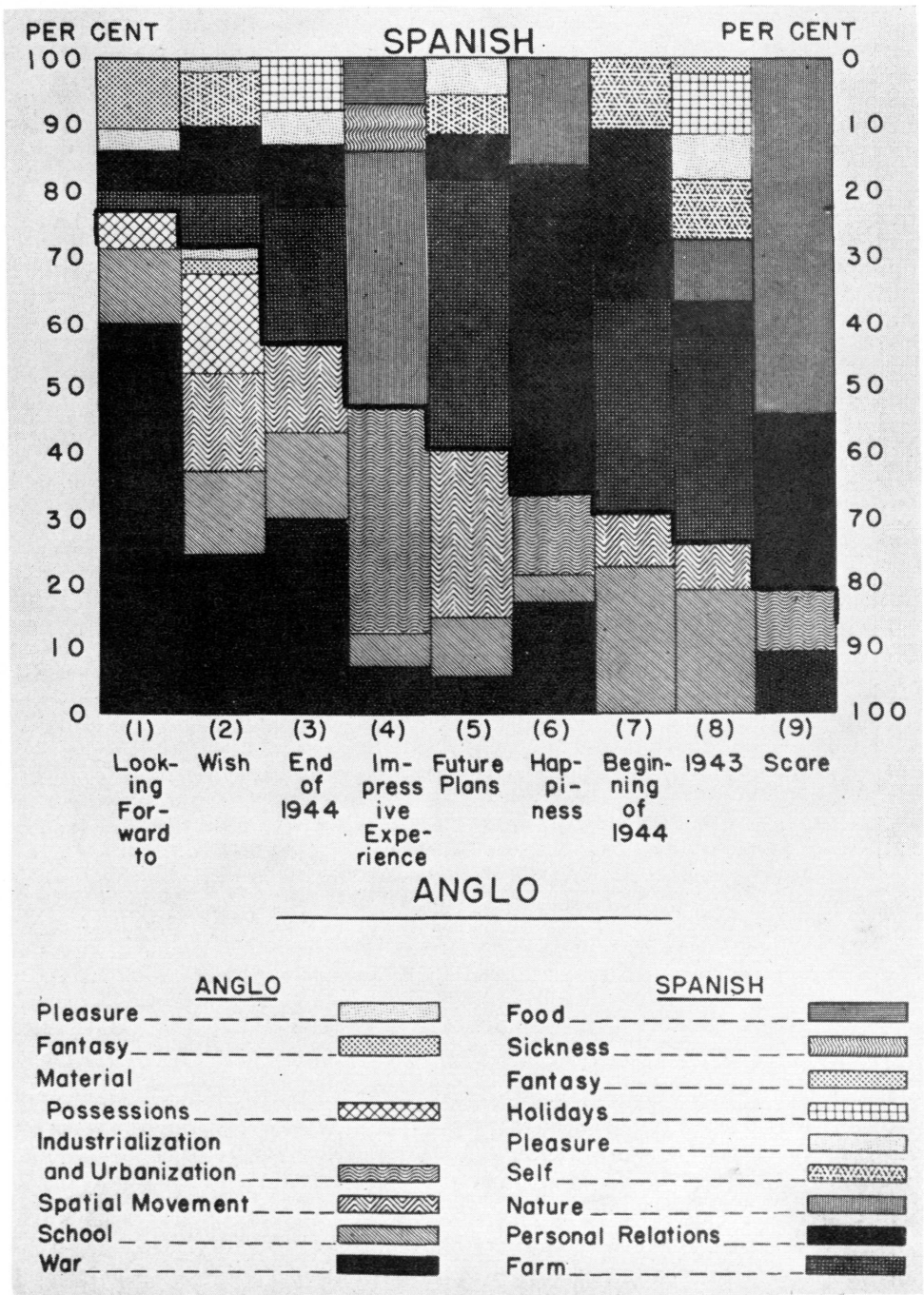


FIG. 3. Percentages of Anglo and Spanish Components of Responses by School Children to Nine Stimuli: Loma, 1944.

by Lotario's younger sister Celia. While her brother may be said to participate in two worlds, Spanish and Anglo, Celia's outlook seems little Anglicized in spite of her equally good English and other "participations" in American culture. In part, this is due to her being a girl. As her most impressive experience, she recalled the onset of menstruation and the fatal accident of a younger sister—whereas the brother's most fundamental change, as interpreted by him, consisted in the process of education; and he did not even mention the sibling's death. Finally, there are two persons, mother and daughter, Lamberta and Bess, whose lives are almost exclusively definable in terms of a decaying institution—prostitution, which may be presented as the Lomans' handling of one component of human nature—evil, especially sex. Lamberta, the mother, although she has initiated a large number of boys into the sex act, is treated like any other villager, in a friendly, ordinary manner. But her role is no longer stable and clear: Lamberta is cautious, diffident, confused. Furthermore, while she emphatically asserts her complete agreement with church doctrine, including confession, her daughter, as yet unmarried, favors divorce, uses the expression "none of the priest's business," prefers Anglos, would like to marry one, is strongly attracted by the "city" but at the same time attached to her mother and the "folks." She has no longer any idea of "human nature," whereas her mother is still bewildered by it—already bewildered by it, if in turn, Lamberta is seen against the past.

The children in the fifth to eighth grades were asked (by the substitute Anglo teacher) to respond to the following stimuli: "What are you looking forward to?" "What do you wish for most?" "Make a calendar for the rest of this year (1944)." "What made the greatest impression on you?" "What are your plans for the future?" "Describe when you were most happy." "Make a calendar for the past part of this year." "Make a calendar for last year (1943)." "Describe when you were most scared."² The answers to these questions were analyzed in regard to Anglo and Spanish components posited, on the whole, on the basis of an "image" of Loman culture which had been gathered by staying in the community and which is subject to checks yet to be applied. The list just given is in the order of decreasing Anglo percentages. (Cf. Fig. 3.) In the "looking forward to" question, they amounted to 77 per cent, the then current war figuring overwhelmingly. Next (72 per cent) came the "wish," with the war likewise preponderant, but with a close-by tie between desires for spatial movement, mainly trips, and material possessions. Next (57 per cent) came the calendar for the end of 1944, with war once more strongly in the lead. Next (46 per cent), the "most impressive experience," with the reflection of industrialization and urbanization in various respects being clearly prominent. Next (40 per cent), "future plans," with spatial movement outstanding. Next (33 per cent), "happiness," with the war slightly surpassing industrialization and urbanization. Next, the calendars of the past part of 1944 (30 per cent) and of 1943 (26 per cent), with school experiences ranking uppermost; finally, 18 per cent of the children's "scare" memories were Anglo components, equally connected with the war and with aspects of industrialization.

Of the complementary Spanish elements, fantasy was most important in the 23 per cent of the "looking forward to" question; personal relations, in the 28 per cent of the "wish"; farm matters, in the 43 per cent of the calendar for the end of 1944; nature, in the 54 per cent of the "most impressive experience"; again farm matters, in the 60 per cent of the "future plans"; personal relations, in the 67 per cent of "happiness"; the farm once more, in the calendars of the

²A good deal of explaining was necessary to make these questions understandable. This, along with the class-room context, the teacher's personality, and similar factors, made for an important situational impact upon the answers which, however, could not be measured. A consideration such as this is only one among many which went into the technique of analyzing the children's answers in regard to Spanish and Anglo components. The technique cannot be described here.

past part of 1944 (70 per cent) and of 1943 (74 per cent); and nature, in the 82 per cent of the "scare" memories.

If the overpowering contemporaneous event, World War II, as well as all items amounting to less than three per cent each of the components in either the Anglo or the Spanish class, are eliminated, the children's answers can exhaustively be classified into three Anglo items, totaling 37 per cent of all components, namely, the school, spatial movement, and industrialization and urbanization; and into four Spanish items, totaling 63 per cent, namely, personal relations, the farm, nature, and the self. The Anglo components reflect, respectively, interest in an institution, expressions of attitudes, and impacts of a process. The Spanish components reflect social relations ("personal relations" and, as an inspection of the children's answers indicates, "self") and institutions ("farm" and "nature").

The analysis of culture change has thus led to a confrontation with Loman culture itself. As this culture emerges from an analysis of the children's compositions, and from the life histories, it would appear to be a culture which, in the way described, has both Anglo and Spanish components. But this statement anticipates a good deal. For it is based, also, on answers to questions which have not been discussed here, as well as on the largely unknown impact on the answers given, an impact called forth by the situation in which the questions were asked. The validity of statements concerning Loman culture can be increased only if it is possible to formulate them in a less tentative and more intelligent and justifiable fashion. This, in turn, can be done only if Anglo-Spanish relations are more intimately studied—if, that is, the structure of the Loman social system is better understood.

At this stage of analyzing the data, neither this nor the many other things that need being worked out and clarified have been done. What has been presented, therefore, stands pending the solution of these tasks, since it has been elaborated to the point, it would seem, where it can be revised only upon their completion.

*By "institution" is understood, here, a unit, within a socio-cultural context, which contains social and cultural elements (individuals and their relations, and their interpretations) and which also may contain elements of the natural environment; a unit which must "be counted with" by the participant individuals. It may be suggested that while in Loman culture, Nature is an institution in this sense, it is not an institution in the typical urban culture, although it is one (with, however, variable contents), perhaps, in rural culture generally, and very probably, in the Anglo culture of Loma.

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